



The Human Services Workforce Initiative

MULTIPLE WORKFORCES

The Workforce Partnership: Human Services and Human Resources



Prepared by
CPS Human Resource Services

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Cornerstones for Kids Introduction

The Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI) is focused on the frontline workers serving vulnerable children and families. HSWI's premise is that human services matter. Delivered well, they can, and do, positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and families, often at critical points in their lives.

We believe that the quality of the frontline worker influences the effectiveness of services they deliver to children and families. If workers are well-trained and supported, have access to the resources that they need, possess a reasonable workload, and are valued by their employers, it follows that they will be able to effectively perform their jobs. If, however, they are as vulnerable as the children and families that they serve, they will be ineffective in improving outcomes for children and families.

Unfortunately, all indications today are that our frontline human services workforce is struggling. In some instances poor compensation contributes to excessive turnover; in others an unreasonable workload and endless paperwork render otherwise capable staff ineffective; and keeping morale up is difficult in the human services fields. It is remarkable that so many human services professionals stick to it, year after year.

HSWI's mission is to work with others to raise the visibility of, and sense of urgency about, workforce issues. Through a series of publications and other communications efforts we hope to

- Call greater attention to workforce issues
- Help to describe and define the status of the human services workforce
- Disseminate data on current conditions
- Highlight best and promising practices
- Suggest systemic and policy actions that can make a deep, long-term difference

In this paper CPS Human Resource Services describes the role that human resources can play in improving the quality and working conditions of frontline human services staff. The report provides case studies of three human services departments and outlines best practices these agencies share in developing human services/human resources partnerships and working to improve their workforces.

Additional information on the human services workforce, and on HSWI, is available at www.cornerstones4kids.org.

Cornerstones For Kids
2006

Executive Summary

Human services agencies are only as good as the workforce that directly serves children, youth, and their families. Yet most observers agree that this workforce has not received adequate attention; workforce issues of crisis proportions, including high turnover, shortages of qualified applicants, and low morale, challenge human services agencies across the country.

There is growing awareness of the critical impact the human services workforce has on service delivery and successful client outcomes. We believe that human services agencies, by working with human resources as a strategic partner, can improve their workforce and thereby improve client outcomes.

This strategic partnership between human resources and human services is crucial to

- Engaging the frontline workforce toward outcome-focused strategies
- Moving the human resources function from a “transactional” role to a “transformational” role
- Implementing the agency’s strategies and realizing its objectives

In this paper we examine some of the most important workforce challenges identified through the Human Services Workforce Initiative. We describe how three human services agencies have improved service delivery by engaging human resources as a strategic partner. We also outline best practice characteristics these agencies share in developing this partnership and working to improve their workforces.

By sharing information on best and promising practices, we hope to continue the work of the Human Services Workforce Initiative and provide information about what works. We also hope to help create more human services/human resources partnerships and more champions of the human services workforce.

The Human Services Workforce Initiative

The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched the Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI) as the first national effort to address the critical condition of the workforce that helps care for America's most disadvantaged children and families. Today HSWI is managed by Cornerstones For Kids. The initiative highlights the urgent need to recruit and retain workers who have the appropriate training and support to make crucial decisions that affect families. HSWI has found that a stable, prepared, and engaged human services workforce yields real reform and better results for children and families.

The Context of Human Services

Having a stable, highly-qualified workforce¹ is essential if human services agencies are to provide quality service to the nation's most disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens. Yet workforce issues of crisis proportions challenge human services agencies across the country, both public and private. In the face of the adverse consequences of high turnover, shortages of qualified applicants, and low morale, many human services agencies appear to lack the capacity to address their human resources management issues.

Human Resources as Strategic Partner – Research Findings

During the past decade, there has been a growing awareness of the significant contributions human resources can—or should—make to the ability of human services agencies² to meet their strategic objectives. Although most of the attention and research has focused on the private sector, many of the findings and conclusions are also applicable to the public sector.

According to a recent survey conducted by the management consulting firm Accenture, business executives identify management of the workforce as a top priority. “In fact, four of the top five strategic priorities cited by the CEOs, CFOs, COOs and CIOs surveyed are workforce related: attracting and retaining skilled staff, changing organizational culture and employee attitudes, changing leadership and management behaviors, and improving workforce performance” (Bates 2003). Furthermore, about one-third of the responding executives ranked human resources³ as one of their three most important functional areas—ranking it more important than research and development, finance, and information technology.

Based on our recent research with public-sector human services agencies, we suspect that a formal survey of human services chief executives would reveal similar results. There is clearly a growing awareness among these executives of the critical impact the human services workforce has on service delivery and successful client outcomes. Yet despite that recognition, few agencies involve human resources (HR) as a partner to proactively develop strategies to help improve agency outcomes or to develop innovative programs to solve workforce problems. Even fewer of these human services agencies value the contributions that their human resources departments could potentially make.

¹ In this paper, the human services workforce includes frontline staff in five fields: child welfare, juvenile justice (detention and probation), child care, youth development (after school), and employment services.

² The term human services agency includes child welfare agencies.

³ We use the term “human resources” throughout this paper except in reference to the State of Alabama, where the term Personnel is used in order to differentiate this function from the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

Human services agencies can improve their overall workforce and, as a result, improve client outcomes by working with human resources as a strategic partner. We identified three human services agencies that are doing just that.

- **The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services.** The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is one of the largest and most complex human services agencies in the country. With a population of nearly 10 million, Los Angeles County is the largest county in the United States and has a population larger than all but eight states. Both the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) referred us to Los Angeles County. Dr. David Sanders, the DCFS's director, recognizes the critical importance of the workforce in organizational success and is committed to providing support systems for social workers in the field. Dr. Sanders has also fully involved human resources as a strategic partner in bringing about change.
- **The Alabama Department of Human Resources.** The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) administers the full range of human services programs for a population of approximately 4.5 million throughout the state of Alabama, including child and family services, adult services, public assistance, and child support. CWLA referred us to the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Alabama has made a remarkable turnaround as a human services agency. "Alabama set the pace," says Richard Wexler, director of the National Coalition for Child Protective Reform in Virginia. "Though they've had some setbacks, I still view Alabama as a national model."
- **Lorain County, Ohio, Children Services Board.** Lorain County's population is approximately 300,000. Both the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Public Children's Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) consider the Lorain County Children Services Board (CSB) one of the best agencies in Ohio. The Lorain County CSB is an "employer of choice" for social workers in the state of Ohio, has a turnover rate below ten percent, and is consistently one of the top performers among metropolitan and major-metropolitan counties in the state based on Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation measures. Lorain County CSB serves as a very positive example of the benefits of providing a supportive organizational culture where employees are respected and valued for their contributions to the agency.

In this paper, we describe how these human services agencies improved service delivery by engaging human resources as a strategic partner.

Describing the Partnership Culture

In our search for agencies in which there is a real partnership between human services and human resources, we found that such agencies shared a number of best practice characteristics.

Human resources leadership thoroughly understands the business of the human services agency.

Having an in-depth understanding of the work of the human services agency is a critical element of the partnership model. However, simply knowing what frontline staff do is not sufficient. Many in human resources believe that the information they gather through a classification study—a review of the duties and responsibilities of the job—provides them with a good understanding of the agency's business.

HR's Question: What workforce changes should we implement to help the agency achieve its long-term strategic objectives?

Many workforce changes, such as reducing turnover, take years to implement and fully take affect. It makes sense for HR to develop and implement incremental plans over shorter time periods—for example, one year—that will help achieve strategic objectives within three to five years. Tactics may include the following:

- Identifying new functions and the competencies needed for the new work
- Developing/refining recruitment and selection plans to incorporate the new competencies
- Hiring leaders at all levels
- Improving employee engagement in developing solutions to workforce issues and in outcome-focused strategies
- Enhancing leadership mentoring or coaching programs
- Increasing employee accountability at all levels of the organization. Sharing outcome-based data and incorporating outcome-based measures in performance management
- Developing specific training curricula

Although it's a start, truly understanding the business of the agency requires knowing what employees need to accomplish in their jobs and make the agency successful, what the potential barriers are to their success, and how HR can help overcome the barriers.

Human resources leadership understands how HR can contribute to the achievement of the agency's strategic objectives.

Although understanding the business of the agency is an important first step, human resources needs to think through how HR can develop programs and initiatives to help the agency achieve its strategic objectives. Many, if not most, human services agencies engage in some form of strategic planning. The strategic plan may focus on the direction of the agency

HR leaders can learn more about the business of human services and how they can act as strategic partners from the Human Services Workforce Initiative.

www.cornerstones4kids.org

for the next three to five years in conjunction with a short-term—perhaps one year—business plan. Human resources then needs to determine how it can align itself with the agency's overall planning effort.

Human resources leadership builds business partnerships with human services operations managers.

A common theme expressed by the chief executives of the human services agencies we interviewed is that human resources must form meaningful business partnerships with the operations managers they serve. Human resources departments that have built a business partnership with their frontline organizations develop policies and procedures based on what is best for the human services workforce.

Eight of the ten largest human services agencies acknowledge that turnover is a serious issue, but none rely on data to make planning decisions to address the problem.

-CPS, What Counts?

Beyond understanding the business of the operating units, they also solicit input and involvement from the operating units when developing policies and procedures. Perhaps more importantly, they work at building relationships with frontline managers based on trust and support.

Human resources leadership relies on data in planning and decision making.

A review of the literature from the private sector emphasizes the importance of basing human resources decisions on tangible evidence and data (Grensing-Pophal 2000). Yet, our recent research into the availability, usefulness, and reliance on data in decision making by the country's ten largest human services agencies demonstrates that human resources decisions are rarely based on or supported by concrete data in these agencies (CPS 2005d).

In the agencies highlighted here, we found that decisions are data driven, and targeted efforts are based on analysis of pertinent data. For example, in Lorain County, researching the student demographics at colleges and universities helps to focus recruitment efforts at those programs that can advance the agency's diversity goals. Even in agencies that gather and analyze data and make information-based decisions, data can be shared much more broadly, including with frontline employees.

"The HR department is the source and keeper of critical information, which is key in today's workplace. With the information they provide, we in turn can build and design strategies to hire and retain the best workforce possible" (Leonard 2002). Most of the executives say they depend heavily on their human resources departments not only to provide vital workforce data, they also point out that how human resources uses information can be the difference to building a strong and lasting strategic partnership.

Human resources leadership becomes a change agent in improving the organizational culture.

In recent years, there has been growing awareness of the relationship between how employers treat their employees and how employees treat their customers (clients). Employee engagement and organizational support can have a positive impact on productivity, turnover, and quality of service. The culture of an organization can be supportive and nurturing of employees or just the opposite. Human resource leaders have an important role in creating an organizational culture in which employees can thrive.

In all three of the sites that we visited, we saw evidence of human resource leaders as change agents:

- Los Angeles County's Personnel Officer, David Waage, talked extensively about human resources' role in the department's three-year plan to change the culture of the agency to become more supportive of frontline staff. He recognizes the importance of focusing on performance management. The system the department is designing is intended to shift toward managing outcomes rather than just process.
- Thomas King, Alabama's Personnel Manager, has been instrumental in eliminating unnecessary barriers in the hiring system and developing training programs for supervisors focused on supporting frontline staff.
- In Lorain County, Human Resources Manager Don Starett makes a conscious effort to develop human resource policies that support employees and de-emphasize their regulatory nature.

All three of these human resource managers believe that human resources must take a leadership role in transforming the culture of their agencies to one that supports and engages the workforce.

Human resources leadership knows the human resources business "inside and out."

For human resources to add value to the agency as a strategic partner, human resources leadership must develop real expertise in the increasingly complex human resources profession. Human resources leadership must not only understand the human resources policies and programs within their agencies, they must understand the dynamics of an evolving profession.

Over the past several years, human resources professionals, particularly in the private sector, have placed a real focus on "professionalizing" the field of human resources management. Professional organizations such as the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) and the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) offer certification programs geared toward professionalizing the field and supporting individuals' professional development.

In the agencies where we observe strategic partnerships evolving, the human resources leaders are real professionals in the field. They read professional journals, attend conferences and attempt to establish networking systems with human resources leaders in other human services jurisdictions. In fact, in all three of the jurisdictions we've highlighted, human resources leadership wished there were more opportunities to network with their human resources peers in other human services agencies. In each of these jurisdictions, the innovative approaches implemented to address workforce problems were largely trial and error attempts to strengthen the effectiveness of the workforce. Each of these managers believes that they could have benefited from learning about successful initiatives in other human services settings and then adapting those solutions to the needs of their own agencies.

It takes a champion to move HR from a transactional role to a transformational role. Being a strategic partner means the head of HR is at risk both for the success of the business and for how the HR department supports that business need.

Human resources staff has determined leadership – a champion.

*"The head of human resources has to have the desire to move the department forward into a strategic partner role. For some human resources professionals, it is much easier and safer to maintain their department as only an administrative function and not take on the associated risks of running the business. Being a strategic partner means the head of human resources is more at risk both for the success of the business and how the human resources department supports that business need."*⁴

If the human resources function is going to move from a "transactional" role to a "transformational" role, change is inevitable. And change can be guaranteed to make many people uncomfortable both inside and outside of the human resources department. To be successful in the strategic partnership role, human resources leadership must be willing to take risks, build support for their initiatives, have the management skills to successfully implement the initiative, and withstand criticism from the skeptics. Support from the agency head is imperative.

In our search for human resources departments playing a strategic role, we found much of what we expected—many human resources leaders "playing it safe." But in other, we found human resources leadership with great ideas, who really want to make a difference in their agencies. Some have had the courage to push for a better way to address workforce issues, and some have not.

We observe that workforce issues can be addressed most successfully when both the agency head and the human resources leadership are determined leaders or champions. Additionally, continuing to successfully address workforce issues in the long-term will require "champion succession planning."

⁴ Kent, 2002.

The Human Services/Human Resources Strategic Partnership – Three Case Studies

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is one of the largest and most complex human services agencies in the country. With a population of nearly ten million, Los Angeles County is the largest county in the United States and has a population larger than all but eight states. The county is also very large geographically, stretching 81 miles from end to end. The sheer size, coupled with very heavy traffic congestion, poses some serious challenges for social workers who are required to spend a good part of the workday in the field.

The department employs approximately 6,000 people—about 2,000 employees are children's services workers who carry a caseload and provide direct services to children and families. There are another 500 children's services workers who do not carry a caseload and about 500 frontline supervisors.

Our Contacts at LA County DCFS

Dr. David Sanders

DCFS Director, 2003 – present

David Waage

DCFS Personnel Officer, 2004 - present

Two additional factors contribute to the challenge of managing the department. The racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the county requires that DCFS expend considerable effort to recruit and select workers who are not only bilingual but also are sensitive to the cultural differences within the community. Secondly, the department functions in a highly political environment where the Board of Commissioners and the press have publicly vilified everyone from the social workers to the department director. Up until 2003, the department experienced a “revolving door” of directors with short tenures.

The Story

Prior to becoming director of the LA County DCFS in 2003, Dr. David Sanders served for ten years as the director of the Hennepin County (Minnesota) Department of Children and Family Services. Dr. Sanders has a passion for workforce issues and believes “...a stable workforce is key to driving positive outcomes. It's the worker who forms a relationship with families and drives success.”

Soon after becoming director, Dr. Sanders began looking for ways to provide more support for the workers directly serving children and families. One of his initial observations was that turnover among children's services workers was nearly 20 percent per year, a rate much higher than the five percent turnover rate he had experienced in Hennepin County. Based on the belief that a stable workforce is essential to providing quality client services, he began to work with human resources to identify the reasons for the unacceptable turnover rate.

They discovered that a major contributor to high turnover was caseload size. Many of the workers who were valued "on the front line" had been pulled out of direct service positions and placed in specialized jobs, resulting in very high caseloads for those providing direct service to families. At one point, each worker was responsible for as many as 80 children. Soon after coming to Los Angeles County, Dr. Sanders determined that caseload size could be significantly reduced by moving a number of former caseworkers who had been promoted to specialized jobs back to direct services positions. Although a seemingly unpopular and controversial move, Dr. Sanders enlisted the assistance of human resources leadership to work with the union to build support for the idea. Human resources' role in building a cooperative partnership with the union was instrumental in successfully implementing this strategy.

If LA County can have a six percent turnover rate, anyone can do it.

**-Dr. David Sanders
Director, DCFS**

Since 2003, the number of direct service staff has nearly doubled. Now, caseloads range from 25 to 30 children per worker, and the agency goal is to reduce the caseload size to 20 children per worker. Today, the turnover rate has dropped to six percent. Dr. Sanders credits addressing workforce issues for the dramatic drop in turnover and workers' feeling that DCFS is a "great place to work." David Waage, DCFS personnel officer, identifies several factors contributing to the drop in turnover rate:

First, I think employees are just more satisfied here than they have been in the past. This has been the first period of any real stability in the organization in a long time.... Moving a number of workers back to direct service was very affirming. We also added supervisors and now the ratio is from 5:1 to 6:1, which provides more support to workers. ... We've really focused on those who can help bring about change. I think people just feel like it's a better place to work.

The Partnership

We believe that most experts in the human services field would agree with Dr. Sanders' belief that a committed, qualified, and stable workforce is essential to the delivery of quality child and family services. Dr. Sanders' commitment to and passion for workforce issues is very evident. In the three years he has been in LA County, he and his human resources staff have made great strides in addressing workforce issues. The union and employees are included as partners in designing and implementing new initiatives. Turnover of children's services workers has been reduced from nearly 20 percent per year to only six percent, a remarkably low rate for any human services agency. It is perhaps even more remarkable in

the context of the many challenges found in LA County. In Dr. Sander's words, "If LA County can have a six percent turnover rate, anyone can do it."

Through LA County's strategic partnership, the focus on addressing workforce challenges will allow DCFS to attain its long-term objectives:

- LA County is committed to redesigning its work processes and strategies to not only provide better outcomes for children and families, but also to more closely align with the goals and values of individual workers.
- Although case management is an essential part of the job, LA County is placing an ever-greater emphasis on what workers believe to be "real social work"—developing service plans and working directly with children and families on "treatment" issues. Even though the work is becoming more challenging, it is the kind of work social workers value doing.
- LA County recognizes the importance of focusing on performance management. The system it is designing is intended to shift toward managing outcomes rather than just processes.

The HR/HS Strategy to Improve Service Delivery

"A stable workforce is key to driving positive outcomes."

- Reduce worker turnover by reducing caseload sizes
- Shift strategy: manage toward outcomes rather than processes
- Align the goals/values of social workers and those of the agency to each other
- Support the workforce: improve supervision; provide workers with what they need to excel
- Provide workers with the opportunity to do the work they value

The Role of Human Resources

When Dr. Sanders arrived in Los Angeles County, he discovered that the County's Human Resources Department had some years earlier removed the human resources responsibility from DCFS as a result of a number of administrative problems. Dr. Sanders counts as one of his early successes his ability to convince the county to return the human resources responsibility to DCFS. He believes that human resources leadership has a critical role as the agency shifts its strategy to managing toward outcomes. He believes that human resources needs to be included in the initial decision making rather than be considered only in a reactive mode.

The change in philosophy is very apparent to human resources staff, one of whom (the "resident historian") commented, "Managers are finally starting to include human resources. It used to be that we were the last to know, but now they involve us from the beginning. When we understand the goals of the program, we can make some very useful contributions in the beginning stages."

Dr. Sanders believes that his employees chose social work as a profession because they want to have a positive impact on the lives of children and families. Consequently, he sees an important aspect of his job as fostering an environment where workers can be successful. Overall, Dr. Sanders believes that supporting the workforce is critically important:

The quality of the relationship between the worker and the family has a lot to do with outcomes. And the relationship between the agency and the worker has a lot to do with the worker's relationship with families. If the organization reflects what the worker wants to do, they'll stay. People need to see this as a great organization—and that can happen, the more we can align with what people want to do and to feel good about what we're doing. If they feel like the organization is progressing, they are more likely to want to be a part of it.

**The Elements of HR's
Partnership Role**

- Focus on outcomes-driven management
- Develop support systems so workers can do their best
- Implement a supportive performance-management system
- Include union and employees as partners in designing and implementing new initiatives

Mr. David Waage has been DCFS's personnel officer for about two years, having previously worked for Dr. Sanders in Hennepin County. Mr. Waage believes that Dr. Sanders is totally committed to providing an environment where children's services workers can do their best work. He stated that the agency is in the midst of a three-year culture change, in which the focus is on providing the direct services staff with the support systems they need to excel in their jobs. The department intends to bring greater alignment between the goals and values of the agency and those of the social workers.

The department is moving toward greater inclusiveness in decision making and is involving the union and social workers in the development of new strategies for serving children and families.

A major payoff to the department from the improved labor-management relationship is that the union has an investment in the outcomes of the initiatives. Because they are stakeholders in the process, they have worked hard to convince their members to see the advantages of the new way of doing things. The union has also seen its members become more willing to participate in labor-management initiatives because they no longer see the process as "just a waste of time" where their input was not valued.

Mr. Waage also believes in the importance of having a good performance-management system, but there is sometimes resistance within an agency to implementation. Sometime after he arrived in LA County, there was a tragedy involving a child death and the media focused on a number of workers and supervisors, creating a great deal of tension throughout the department. In spite

of the tragedy, the circumstances created a readiness for introducing the idea of a performance-management system that could spell out accountabilities and track performance. Performance management is now a way to protect staff rather than what was sometimes perceived as a way “to get staff.”

Alabama Department of Human Resources

Background

The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) administers the full range of human services programs for a population of approximately 4.5 million throughout the state of Alabama, including child and family services, adult services, public assistance, and child support. The department has nearly 4,400 employees, of whom approximately 1,880 children’s services workers are located in Alabama’s 67 county offices.

Dr. Page Walley has been the commissioner for the past two years, having formerly been the commissioner in Tennessee. Dr. Walley brings a fairly unique perspective to the department because he has also served as a state legislator.

Although Alabama has a state-administered system, the county boards are responsible for hiring the directors for the county offices. This shared authority between the counties and the state imposes an added challenge for the state department in holding county directors accountable.

In 2004, Alabama was able to assert compliance with a consent decree stemming from a 1988 federal lawsuit filed on behalf of a foster child. The settlement, known as the R.C. Consent Decree, required Alabama to revamp its child welfare system, and although Alabama retained control of the system, a Federal Court Monitor was appointed to oversee implementation. In addition, in 2004 Alabama completed all of the necessary steps for its Program Improvement Plan (PIP), as required by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Alabama’s remarkable turnaround in making improvements to its child welfare system has drawn national acclaim.

Our Contacts at Alabama DHR

Dr. Page Walley

DHR Commissioner, 2004 – present

Thomas King

DHR Personnel Manager

P.L. Corley

DHR Deputy Commissioner

James Slaughter

DHR Deputy Commissioner/Field Administration

The Story

Alabama DHR believes that employees with BSW and MSW degrees, on the whole, provide better service. In the past several years, DHR has increased the number of BSWs and MSWs from 10 percent to 40 percent.

Dr. Walley stated, "The workforce is foundational in meeting outcomes. It takes both adequate staffing levels and quality staff. We need both to be successful in our permanency and placement outcomes." One of the important steps Alabama took was to convince the legislature that it was necessary to fund enough caseworkers to keep caseloads at a reasonable level. But, having the dollars necessary to hire enough staff isn't sufficient unless the agency can fill jobs quickly, with the right people, reduce turnover, and provide supportive supervision. Dr. Walley believes that having good supervision is critical. "Jobs are becoming more demanding and stressful. You need to have good supervision to combat the turnover issues."

The Partnership

Personnel Manager Thomas King understands the relationship that recruitment and retention have to client outcomes, and he understands the business needs of the agency. He has formed strong partnerships not only with the deputy for field administration but also with the county offices as well. As a result, the number of BSW and MSW hires have significantly increased, retention has been improved, and the hiring process has been streamlined by no longer testing the BSW and MSW candidates. In addition, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners clearly value the human resources function and provide genuine support for the programs and initiatives supported by Mr. King and his staff.

The HR/HS Strategy to Improve Service Delivery

"The workforce is foundational in meeting outcomes."

- Ensure adequate staffing levels
- Obtain necessary funding to maintain staffing levels to keep caseload levels reasonable
- Improve qualifications of workers by emphasizing appropriate degrees and licensure
- Improve supervision to help combat turnover
- Focus on improving worker and management performance

Alabama has made tremendous strides in improving its child welfare program during the past several years. Much of its success can be attributed to its commitment to address workforce issues:

- It was able to convince the legislature that appropriately staffing the child welfare area is critical.
- It has made significant strides in improving the qualifications of children's services workers, by placing significant emphasis on appropriate degrees and licensure.

- It has placed greater emphasis on performance and has dealt with not only non-performing employees, but non-performing managers as well.

With a look to the future and the challenges that lie ahead in Alabama, Mr. King acknowledges that DHR needs to do more, “We have not done a good job at succession planning with 25 percent eligible to retire now. We lost a generation—we have the baby boomers here, soon to retire, and we have the newest generation working; we don’t have the in-between generation working here.”

They also want to do more to reform human resource management practices at the local county level, identify standards, and create a self-assessment tool so the counties can conduct their own performance audits and see how the county measures up to the standards.

By all appearances, the human resources function is fully integrated into the everyday operations and decision making of the agency. The strategic partnership between personnel and the rest of the agency at human resources is very much a two-way street.

The Elements of HR’s Partnership Role

- Primary mission of Personnel is to serve field offices
- Reform merit and classification systems
- Improve recruitment and selection
- Aggressively recruit BSW and MSW candidates
- Partner with universities to ensure appropriate course offerings, offer evening classes, and develop stipend program

The Role of Human Resources

Thomas King recognizes that the Personnel Department’s primary mission is to serve the field and to make sure that the needs of the counties are being met. Deputy Commissioner P.L. Corley stated, “He (King) has restored the faith of the counties in the central office by embracing the philosophy that the state department is there to serve the counties.” Dr. Walley considers Mr. King to be a key manager in the department. Even though Mr. King reports to P.L. Corley and not directly to the commissioner, he has regular, direct access to Dr. Walley on personnel issues.

Dr. Walley believes that personnel staff have been critical in contributing to Alabama’s turnaround. The personnel department has worked closely with the state’s merit system to eliminate unnecessary barriers in the hiring system, such as written testing for applicants possessing BSW or MSW degrees, allowing more “open competitive” appointments, and permitting the department to administer the civil service tests.

Personnel has also played a critical role in increasing the number of BSW and MSW staff, as a result of its aggressive recruitment strategies. The Alabama Department of Human Resources believes that employees with BSW and MSW degrees, on the whole, provide better service. In years past, however, it faced a real shortage of applicants with these very desirable credentials. One of Mr. King's first initiatives was to strengthen the recruitment and selection process. James Slaughter, deputy commissioner/field administration, had a strong belief that employees with a BSW or MSW degree were more likely to take a job with the agency as a career rather than just a "short-term" job. Together, Slaughter and King developed a multi-year, multi-part plan for addressing the problem and worked with the colleges and universities in Alabama offering those degrees to make the curriculum more relevant to the jobs at the Department of Human Resources. The plan included the following elements:

Read about Alabama's remarkable turnaround in the New York Times story, "Once Woeful, Alabama Is Model in Child Welfare," by Eric Eckholm.

- Encouraging Alabama universities offering BSW and MSW degrees to offer evening and weekend classes so that current employees could obtain the degrees while still working
- Working with the universities to modify the curriculum to make it more relevant to the work done at the Department of Human Resources
- Working with the universities to develop a stipend program (\$2,000) for social work majors who do their field placement at the Department of Human Resources
- Designing a BSW/MSW part-time educational leave program through which employees can take up to 20 hours of paid leave each week to take classes or engage in their field placement. The program requires a work commitment based on the length of the educational leave
- Working with the state's civil service department to create a new classification for workers with a BSW so that they could be recruited at a premium entry rate. Under the current pay structure, those with the BSW at the maximum rate can earn about 2.5 percent more than workers with a BA degree in the human services field (the minimum qualification for a children's services worker). Those with the MSW can earn about ten percent more than those with the BSW at the maximum rate. The greater premium rate for those with the MSW has existed for quite some time
- Developing an intensive recruitment program, which calls for increasing the number of licensed social workers
- Allowing employees to be placed on the promotional eligibility list by virtue of having attained their degree and waiving the testing requirement

As a result of this concerted effort, the number of BSWs and MSWs has increased from 10 percent to 40 percent in the past several years. Mr. King understands the relationship that recruitment and retention have to client outcomes. Mr. King credits Mr. Slaughter's intensive efforts to work with the colleges/universities as a best practice with huge, long-lasting potential for the department and the social work profession in the State of Alabama.

The Role of Workforce Accountability

Mr. King realized that employees have to be held accountable if the agency as a whole was going to be successful. The commissioner and deputy commissioners all believe that the personnel manager has formed a strategic alliance with the county officials and convinced them that the personnel department is there to meet their needs as customers.

Dr. Walley and Mr. King shifted decision making to the county directors, empowering them and holding them more accountable—despite initial skepticism by some central staff. For example, they gave county directors the ability to fill vacant positions without going through the approval process if the county was below staffing allocations. They also gave county directors the data/information to manage their staffing allocations.

Mr. King formed a partnership with the counties to help them deal with performance problems, to offer guidance, and to provide support. Dr. Wally credits Mr. King for taking steps to improve employee accountability, stating, “Personnel has taken a more proactive approach in not tolerating the kinds of things that we used to put up with. He (King) has worked very hard to establish a strong partnership with the counties so they receive support and guidance whenever disciplinary action has to be taken.” When Mr. King took over the personnel manager job, an average of only three employees were being terminated each year. By bringing more consistency to the disciplinary process and forming a true partnership with the operating units, the number has increased to about 50 per year, many of these occurring during the new employee’s probationary period.

The Role of Workforce Data

One of the strengths of the personnel office is that it has good workforce data. It produces reports that track vacancy rates, length of time to fill vacancies, and turnover. Even more noteworthy, the personnel office regularly uses the data to monitor its performance and the performance of the county offices. In addition, it shares data with the BSW/MSW programs, for example, statistics on how students performed on the licensing test.

Mr. King’s staff, in partnership with the department’s Office of Management and Fiscal Analysis, monitors and acts on a variety of metrics. By paying close attention to changes in the staffing allocation to counties, The personnel office can focus recruitment efforts on areas where staffing growth will occur. It monitors performance by tracking the average length of time it takes to fill vacancies in each county and tracks turnover by a variety of indicators. In addition, by gathering feedback through its exit survey process, DHR recognized the need to provide leadership training to frontline supervisors.

DHR’s partnership with universities includes sharing data with the BSW/MSW programs, such as statistics on how students are performing on licensing tests.

Lorain County, Ohio Children Services

Background

Lorain County Children Services (LCCS) is responsible for administering all children's services programs for the residents of Lorain County, Ohio. Lorain County's population is approximately 300,000. Children's services programs in Ohio are state supervised and county administered. Lorain County Children Services Board is considered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) to be one of the

best agencies in Ohio. LCCS is consistently one of the top performers among metropolitan and major-metropolitan counties in the state based on Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) measures.

Lorain County is west of Cleveland and can be considered an economically depressed community due in part to the loss of its industrial base during the past several years. The LCCS employs 135 employees—82 are professional social

workers and social work supervisors.

Dr. Gary Crow has been the executive director of LCCS for the past ten years. He and Executive Deputy Director Jeannie Wiesbrod "share the same box" on the organization chart. They have eight direct reports, including Don Starett, the Human Resources Manager.

The Story

When Dr. Crow became executive director of Lorain County Children Services ten years ago, the county had not done a good job of protecting children and providing needed services to their families. Dr. Crow stated that he recognized early on that in order to be successful, "...I had to get staff moving in the same direction, and that's what it's all about—it's all about human resources management. Just as managing the finances and the political environment are important, so is the management of the workforce."

The County's Children Services Board hired Dr. Crow to "turn things around." As one of his initial goals, the board asked Dr. Crow to seek and achieve accreditation from the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services. LCCS was one of the first counties in Ohio to receive accreditation.

In order to achieve accreditation, Dr. Crow knew Lorain County had to upgrade the quality of the workforce. "No matter how much we wanted to be great, we just

Our Contacts at LCCS

Dr. Gary Crow

Executive Director, 1995 - present

Jeannie Wiesbrod

Executive Deputy Director

Don Starett

Human Resources Manager

didn't have the people with the right skill sets and 'the smarts' to do the job right," says Dr. Crow. Together with the human resources manager, Mr. Starett, Dr. Crow set "professionalizing the workforce" as one of agency's initial strategic goals. They met with their union to negotiate a requirement that all social workers have an MSW degree and to implement a 30 percent pay increase for those with the MSW degree. They negotiated a generous tuition reimbursement program to provide additional incentive for current and future employees to obtain the MSW in exchange for a work commitment to the agency.

Over the years, virtually all of the employees either obtained the degree or left the agency. Today, only two employees (who were "grandparented" in under the union agreement) remain who do not have or are not currently working on the MSW. Lorain County's reputation for excellence, coupled with the generous tuition reimbursement program, results in LCCB being able to attract the cream of the crop from a targeted national recruitment effort that focuses on diversity and quality.

Dr. Crow believes that current agency staff is "awesome—they are bright, competent, and dedicated." They have a "shared value set—they are committed to the same things."

Dr. Crow places a high premium on having the right credentials for the job. In his view, having the right credentials to do social work is as important as having a teaching certificate for teachers or the RN degree for nurses. Having a workforce where virtually everyone has a MSW permits the social worker job to be designed so that professional judgment and decision making can be emphasized and prescriptive procedures minimized to the extent possible. Because LCCS is so highly regarded as a good place to work, recruitment of employees with MSWs has become much easier over the years. In recent years, LCCS has enjoyed relatively low turnover—about ten percent—in part because it is a good place to work and in part because employees who have obtained the MSW at agency expense have a four-to-six year work commitment.

LCCS' reputation for excellence, coupled with their generous tuition reimbursement program, allows them to attract the cream of the crop from a targeted national recruitment effort.

The Partnership

Through its strategic partnership with human resources, LCCS has identified workforce challenges that lie ahead. In particular, it has identified the need to always attend to the organizational culture. "We're all responsible for the organizational culture here. Human resources is instrumental in shaping and maintaining the organizational culture. We are only as good as our workforce and human resources is so integrated and interrelated that it can't be separated out."

The HR/HS Strategy to Improve Service Delivery

“Just as managing the finances and the political environment are important, so is the management of the workforce.”

- Professionalize the workforce—receive accreditation from the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services
- Integrate Human Resources into both daily and strategic operations
- Maintain a culture of excellence
- Provide workers with the opportunity to utilize their skills on the job

When we asked Dr. Crow how human resources fits into the strategic planning process of the agency, he responded, “How does the tail fit with the head of a penny?” His view is that human resources is integrated into both the daily and strategic operation of the agency. Just as his board sets broad expectations, Dr. Crow does the same with the staff. He does not claim to be a human resources expert. Rather, he lets Mr. Starett know what outcomes he wants. In fact, workforce issues are so critical to agency success, and human resources is so well integrated

into overall operations that in some instances he expects Mr. Starett to do what needs to be done without being asked.

The Role of Human Resources

Dr. Crow relies on human resources to recruit excellent staff. One of LCCS’ challenges has been to recruit African-Americans, Hispanics, and men. Mr. Starett has been innovative in using the Internet to research the Web sites of schools of social work nationally to determine the demographic composition of their MSW enrollment. He has recruited at universities in both New Mexico and Puerto Rico because of their relatively high proportions of Hispanic students. When attending university job fairs, Mr. Starett also tries to attend meetings of special groups such as the association of black social work students at Wayne State University.

Promising applicants (the top candidate for a specific vacancy) from job fairs or other recruitment efforts are brought to the agency for a two-day job shadowing experience before a job offer is made. The applicants receive two days pay for the visit, and they are reimbursed for their travel expenses. The experience serves as a form of a realistic job preview and gives the unit supervisor an opportunity to informally interview the candidate to help determine if a job offer will be made.

Dr. Crow recognizes that the human resources function isn’t just responsible for the traditional human resources programs. He believes that Mr. Starett is a key person in the development of the organizational culture. One of their shared beliefs is that human resources programs and policies should be employee-friendly and are primarily intended to support employees and managers rather than to control those who might abuse flexible policies.

To monitor organizational culture and climate, LCCS has a local university do an annual employee attitude survey, which helps the department keep in touch with employee attitudes and job satisfaction. To support an employee-focused culture, Mr. Starett's activities include

- Holding quarterly meetings with the HR committee (a group of employees and supervisors who volunteered for the role). The purpose is to get new ideas from the users of HR services and to improve communications.
- Conducting exit interviews with about 90 percent of the employees who leave the agency (those who choose to participate). The results are shared semiannually with the HR committee and the executive team.
- Providing quarterly training to all supervisors with a focus on improving interaction skills with staff, corrective action, etc.

The Elements of HR's Partnership Role

- Develop an employee-focused culture: HR policies designed to support employees rather than penalize.
- Require MSW degrees for all caseworkers
- Provide competitive pay for workers with MSWs
- Implement continuing education and tuition reimbursement programs
- Implement employee attitude surveys, exit interviews, and management training
- Aggressively recruit to improve diversity

In addition, LCCS offers human resource programs supportive of an employee-friendly culture, including:

- Professional Advanced Continuing Education. LCCS strongly encourages and supports continuing education of employees beyond the MSW level. The department recently entered into a partnership with Case Western Reserve University to offer "Professional Advanced Continuing Education" (PACE) to their MSW employees. PACE is a nine-month program, which meets monthly for a three-hour learning experience. Students are expected to study two hours each week to prepare for the monthly learning experience. The program's objective is to improve students' professional effectiveness.
- Employee Recognition programs, including the *PRIDE* and *Make a Difference* programs. The *PRIDE* program recognizes employees selected from those nominated for their contributions to the permanency and protection of children. The *Make a Difference* program allows staff members to recognize co-workers for going "above and beyond" their job duties.

Summary

The workforce issues confronting the human services field need urgent, consistent, and sustained attention. The need to address the human services workforce crisis requires that human services agencies—both public and private—fully involve their human resources operations in developing solutions.

The strategic partnerships developed in Los Angeles County, the State of Alabama, and Lorain County, Ohio, illustrate how human services managers can integrate and involve human resources to

- Strengthen the recruitment and selection process
- Reduce turnover
- Change the organizational culture to one that values and engages the workforce
- Improve the performance management process to become more outcome-driven
- Work to develop supportive and responsive supervisors

In addition, the human resources leadership in these three agencies are truly champions for their human services workforce.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation recommends a series of steps that human services agencies can use in implementing program reform for improving service delivery and client outcomes:

1. Get good data
2. Analyze the problem
3. Include stakeholders
4. Set goals
5. Measure results

We recommend that agencies use these same steps in addressing their workforce issues. Although these steps are not prescriptive, human services agencies that form partnerships with human resources and move toward accomplishing them will make great strides toward overcoming workforce issues and improving client outcomes.

There is clearly a growing awareness of the critical importance of workforce issues in the delivery of human services. Human service agencies themselves are beginning to address workforce issues, as are the federal government, higher education, and advocacy organizations, as exhibited by the following examples:

- The Human Services Workforce Initiative

- The March, 2003 report by the U.S. General Accountability Office, entitled “HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff”
- The first federally sponsored conference specifically devoted to workforce issues: “Child Welfare Workforce Development and Workplace Enhancement Institute,” sponsored by the Children’s Bureau in Arlington, Virginia, October 24-25, 2005
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funding of five-year grants to 20 university Schools of Social Work in the area of recruitment and retention of child welfare professionals
- “Workforce Development Conference 2006” (Recruiting and Retaining Your Child Welfare Staff), scheduled for May 11-12, 2006, co-sponsored by the Children’s Home Society of Florida and the Florida Coalition for Children
- Information about workforce or human resources issues on the Web sites of leading human services advocacy organizations and associations. See examples at the following websites:
 - Annie E. Casey Foundation (www.aecf.org)
 - American Public Human Services Association (www.aphsa.org)
 - Center for the Study of Social Policy (www.cssp.org)
 - Cornerstones For Kids (www.cornerstones4kids.org)
 - Child Welfare League of America (www.cwla.org)

By sharing information on best and promising practices, we hope to continue the work of the Human Services Workforce Initiative and share information about “what works.” We also hope to help to create more human services/human resources alliances and strategic partnerships and more champions of the human services workforce.

Appendix A: Methodology

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge the agencies and individuals listed below for participating in site visits as part of this project.

Site Visit Descriptions

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

Site Visit Date: December 8-9, 2005

Table 1: LA County DCFS Participants

Name	Title
Dr. David Sanders	Director
David Waage	Personnel Officer (213) 351-5524 waaged@dcfs.co.la.us
Robin Cooper	Payroll and Position Control
Lynne Condon	Exams, Recruitment & Personnel Operations
Corey Hanemoto	Children's Services Administrator
Sheryl Negash	Human Resources Division Director
Marcha Stevenson	Employee Relations Specialist
Tony Bravo	President, Local 535 SEIU
Rochelle Griffin	Dept. of Human Resources
Bruce McDonald	Organizational Development Manager, Dept. of Human Resources

Alabama Department of Human Resources

Site Visit Date: November 2, 2005

Table 2: Alabama DHR Participants

Name	Title
Dr. Page Walley, Ph.D.	Commissioner
Thomas King	Personnel Manager (334) 242-1785 tking@dhr.state.al.us
P.L. Corley	Deputy Commissioner
James Slaughter	Deputy Commissioner/Field Administration
Vera Warren	Assistant Personnel Manager
Mike Salter	Director, Management & Fiscal Analysis
Rick Midkiff	Training Director
Kelly Lever	Administrative Analyst
DeAnna Hand	Public Relations & Recruitment Specialist
LaTisha Love	Recruiter

Lorain County Children Services

Site Visit Date: October 5, 2005

Table 3: LCCS Participants

Name	Title
Dr. Gary Crow	Executive Director
Jeannie Weisbrod	Deputy Executive Director
Donald Starett	Human Resources Manager (440) 329-5325 DonaldStarett@childrenservices.org

Site Visit Questions

Agency Director/Chief Deputy Questions:

1. What role, if any, does your Human Resources (Personnel) department play in the success of this agency?
2. What are the critical workforce issues facing your organization?
 - Is HR (or anyone else in the organization) attempting to address them?
 - If there are any important workforce issues not being addressed, what is the reason?
 - Could HR be doing more to resolve major workforce issues?
3. Is the HR Director a member of your agency's executive team?
 - If so, how does the HR Director contribute to the overall business strategy of the agency?
 - If not, how are the HR perspectives and contributions integrated into the business strategy?
4. Can you think of any examples where HR has suggested new programs or new initiatives that have benefited the agency?
 - What was the program or initiative?
 - What was HR's role in its implementation?
 - What have been the results of the initiative?
5. Have you, or other executive team members, suggested innovative HR programs or strategies that HR successfully implemented?
 - What was the program or initiative?
 - What was HR's role in its implementation?
 - What have been the results of the initiative?
6. Please describe this agency's use of/dependence on protocols, decision tools, quality assurance, and supervision to provide services?
7. In closing, do you consider HR a strategic partner? Why?

HR Manager Questions:

1. What role do you believe HR should play in the success of this agency?
2. What role do you believe HR actually plays in the agency?
3. Can you tell us about the HR organization – its size, areas of responsibility, organization charts, etc.?
4. Have you developed any innovative HR programs or practices that were designed to contribute to the agency's overall success?

5. For each innovation, ask:
 - Where did the idea for the innovation originate?
 - How was the innovation introduced?
 - How has the innovation helped the agency?
 - Is there any measurable evidence of the innovation's impact?
6. Have you or members of the HR staff formed "business partnerships" with other parts of the organization?
 - If so, can you provide any specific examples of partnership activities?
7. Do you think the HR staff person(s) really understands the business needs of the organization (or organizational unit)?
8. Do you think the HR staff person(s) really understands the business objectives, processes, and procedures of the organization (or organizational unit)?
9. In closing, do you consider HR a strategic partner? Why?

Agency/Workforce Information Obtained from Agency Director/Chief Deputy and/or HR Manager:

- Turnover
 - Turnover percentage, by classification/assignment, if available.
 - What do you see as the impact of turnover?
- Caseload
 - Average caseload size, by function/service area.
- Performance management
 - Description of performance management system
 - How are performance standards set/determined/established?
 - How are performance expectations communicated to workers?
 - How is performance feedback provided to workers?
 - How does performance impact pay?
- Competencies
 - What competencies do you need/look for in frontline workers? Professional training? Life experience?
 - And, what competencies do you need/look for in supervisors? Professional training? Life experience?

Appendix B: Authors and Sponsors

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Sponsors

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